

TOP SECRET

102

(43)



25X1

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum

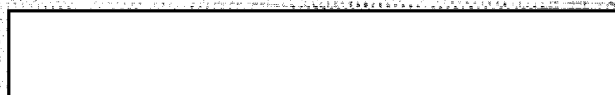


THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
16 September 1966

ARMY and DOS review(s) completed.

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
FURTHER DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION
CONTAINED HEREIN IS NOT AUTHORIZED



25X1

TOP SECRET

25X1

Approved For Release 2004/12/16 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001200010045-3

Approved For Release 2004/12/16 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001200010045-3

16 September 1966

HIGHLIGHTS

Militant Buddhist leader Thich Tri Quang ended his 100-day hunger strike but he stated that he would carry on his struggle against the South Vietnamese Government. An assessment of the Communist buildup in Quang Tri Province and the Demilitarized Zone is given in Section III.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Light contact has been reported between US Marines participating in Operation DECK HOUSE IV and Communist troops near the DMZ in Quang Tri Province (Para. 1). A South Vietnamese Army base camp was attacked yesterday by a battalion-size Viet Cong force in Vinh Long Province (Para. 2).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Tri Quang announced the end of his 100-day hunger strike today, but stated that he would carry on his struggle against the government (Para. 1). At a press conference yesterday, Chief of State Thieu reiterated that the newly elected constituent assembly could not assume any legislative function (Para. 2). Thieu also declared that US troops would soon be needed in the delta region south of Saigon, and stated that his government does not now advocate an invasion of North Vietnam (Para. 3).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments:
An assessment of the Communist buildup in Quang Tri Province is given (Paras. 1-8).

Another MIG engagement occurred on 16 September resulting in one MIG shot down and one US aircraft lost for unknown reasons (Paras. 11-12).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing significant to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: The Soviets are suggesting to a number of neutral countries that they individually sharply criticize US policies in Vietnam at the upcoming session of the UN General Assembly (Paras. 1-3).

16 September 1966

ii



I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. US Marines participating in Operation DECK HOUSE IV, which began on 14 September in northernmost Quang Tri Province, have reported sporadic contact with Communist forces. Yesterday, a Marine patrol encountered more than 100 enemy troops in an area immediately south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). In the brief but heavy fighting that followed, one American was killed and ten wounded. US air strikes and artillery fire supporting the Americans forced the enemy to retreat. Communist losses included nine killed and ten suspects captured. Light contact was reported again today. (See Section III for an assessment of the Communist buildup in the DMZ - Quang Tri Province area.)

2. An estimated battalion-size Communist force attacked a South Vietnamese Army base camp about five miles southwest of Vinh Long city in the delta province of Vinh Long yesterday. During the hour-long attack, ten South Vietnamese soldiers were killed and 20 wounded. Enemy losses are unknown. A reaction force sent to locate the enemy force has thus far been unsuccessful.

16 September 1966

I-1

II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. In a communiqué released at the An Quang pagoda today, militant Buddhist leader Tri Quang announced that he was ending his 100-day fast. Quang pointed out that he was responding to an order from Thich Tinh Khiet, the church's supreme aged patriarch and that he would continue his struggle against the government. In confirming the end of Quang's hunger strike, the US Embassy reported that Quang had rice soup earlier today and that he would "tear into a banana tonight."
2. At a reception for Afro-Asian journalists yesterday, Chief of State Thieu reiterated that the newly elected constituent assembly would be restricted to drafting a constitution, and that it could not assume any legislative function. Military leaders have remained fairly consistent on this issue, although it had been rumored that if the assembly proved to be effective and responsive, it might be turned into a legislature and thus save the cost of another election next year.
3. Among other subjects, Thieu stated that US troops would soon be needed in IV Corps to ensure the security of the Mekong Delta region. Thus far, US ground forces have not operated this area. Thieu also remarked that his government does not advocate an invasion of North Vietnam now, but would send troops over the 17th Parallel whenever "the situation required it." He also said that infiltration from the North would be easier to control if the demarcation line were the 18th rather than the 17th Parallel. Several other ranking officials of the military government attended the reception with General Thieu.

16 September 1966

II-1

III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There have been a number of indications in the last month that North Vietnamese forces have been engaged in an intensive logistic buildup for future offensive operations in South Vietnam's northernmost Quang Tri Province. It appears that this buildup has been considerably disrupted and probably slowed down by US air operations in the area. In addition, US ground operations in Quang Tri Province have kept enemy forces off balance and have probably sharply curtailed the enemy's ability to launch a large-scale offensive operation in the next month.

2. Enemy forces in the Quang Tri Province - Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) area consist primarily of the 9,400-man 324th NVA Division augmented by a fairly extensive logistic support force located in and on both sides of the DMZ. Additional combat forces are probably also infiltrating into this area.

25X1

25X1
25X1

3. The current NVA logistic effort includes nightly movement of military cargoes by junk or other watercraft along the DRV coast to the border area and from there by truck to locations within or near the DMZ. Recent US air strikes in this area have attested to the magnitude of the North Vietnamese effort. For example, during the period

16 September 1966

III-1

25X1

9 to 13 September, air strikes just north of and in the DMZ produced 121 secondary explosions and 156 secondary fires. More than half of these explosions and fires occurred within the DMZ.

4. A current US ground sweep--codenamed Operation PRAIRIE--has placed enemy forces in Quang Tri on the defensive in recent weeks, causing frequent movement and repositioning to avoid air strikes and contact with US forces. Another US operation--named DECK HOUSE IV--began on 15 September and is designed to reinforce PRAIRIE.

25X1

5. MACV estimates that the most probable courses of action for enemy forces in the coming weeks will continue to be defense of their newly established base areas while infiltrating additional forces to increase their offensive capabilities. NVA forces currently have the capability to launch a limited offensive with a reinforced division. Such a push might have the objective of seizing a number of towns, such as Can Lo and Dong Ha along Route 9.

6. The Communist attempt to build up a stronghold in Quang Tri is clearly one of the most important military developments now taking place in the war. In a sense, it is a strategic military move which could be designed to accomplish a number of objectives. For one thing, it puts the Communists in a position to probe out into the populated lowlands of Quang Tri and possibly Thua Thien in the hope of extending their control over the most populous parts of this important section of the country. Beyond this, however, it may also be designed to provide the Communists with a more secure logistics pipeline to Communist forces farther south. By building up and securing the highlands in Quang Tri and Thua Thien, the Communists would obtain fairly firm control over a highlands corridor which could extend down into the central mountain area of South Vietnam. Although the movement of supplies along such a corridor would be difficult, the pipeline would also be tough for the allies to interdict.

III-2

16 September 1966

7. The buildup in Quang Tri by the Communists would also make it much more difficult for any allied cordon of forces to be drawn across South Vietnam and the Laos corridor to cut off infiltration from North Vietnam down the Ho Chi Minh trail. There is good evidence that the Communists fear the allies may eventually try such a move.

8. Beyond these objectives, however, is one which would suggest an entirely new strategic concept by the Communists in the war. By building up a base contiguous with North Vietnamese territory across the DMZ, the Communists may feel they can gradually get in position to slowly push their territorial control further south into central Vietnam. Such a move would offer a means of overcoming some of the recent disadvantages that main force NVA and Viet Cong have been operating under in South Vietnam. The main force units operating in Quang Tri, for example, could obtain air defense, manpower, and logistics support far more readily than the units now operating farther south. If things got hot, they could readily retreat north to temporary refuge much as troops now farther south find secure havens in Cambodia. In short, the buildup in Quang Tri may eventually put the Communists in a position from which they can more or less conduct a standard, frontal type defense-offense against allied forces utilizing interior supply lines, rather than the guerrilla hit-and-run and quick mobile operation which the Communists have had to rely on almost exclusively in the past.

16 September 1966

III-3

25X1

Approved For Release 2004/12/16 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001200010045-3

Approved For Release 2004/12/16 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001200010045-3

North Vietnamese MIGs Engage US Aircraft

11. Preliminary field reports on 16 September indicate that four DRV fighters intercepted three US strike aircraft en route to the Dap Cau railroad and highway bridge 18 miles northeast of Hanoi. In the prolonged engagement that followed the USAF Phantom jets fired several missiles at the MIG-17s and at least one of the Communist interceptors was shot down. One of the US planes is missing after the encounter but the cause could not be immediately determined because of high intensity AAA and missile fire in the area.

12. Three other flights of US strike aircraft reported seeing numerous DRV fighters, including MIG-21s. No other engagements were reported but the high level of MIG activity for the second straight day may be indicative of a new period of aggressiveness on the part of the North Vietnamese Air Force.

16 September 1966

III-4

25X1

Approved For Release 2004/12/16 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001200010045-3

Approved For Release 2004/12/16 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001200010045-3

IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

16 September 1966

IV-1

V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. There have been several reports recently that Soviet diplomats have approached a number of neutral countries suggesting that individually they sharply criticize US policies in Vietnam at the upcoming session of the UN General Assembly.

2. It appears, however, that Moscow is taking care to ensure that any opposition to Washington's policies does not gain sufficient momentum to become organized and result in the introduction of the Vietnam problem on the agenda. As was revealed during Security Council deliberations last session, the USSR remains unalterably opposed to any UN involvement in the Vietnam question, mainly because of Hanoi's adamant objections.

3. Ambassador Goldberg has learned from a Secretariat official that a few weeks ago several delegations were considering the idea of introducing an item on Vietnam. However, they were discouraged by the Soviets. The Russian diplomats were said to have objected to any eventual resolution which would call for mutual de-escalation and warned that if faced with such a development the USSR would add its own amendments which could only make the situation worse.

V-1

16 September 1966

TOP SECRET

Approved For Release 2004/12/16 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001200010045-3

Approved For Release 2004/12/16 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001200010045-3

TOP SECRET